

“MY INVITATION CAN CHANGE THE WORLD”
by Rom A. Pegram (11/24/19)

Welcome back to the final message in our IGNITE series. We wrap up IGNITE today by talking about yet another way for your life to change the world ... eternally. And it has to do (as you've already heard) with 'invitations'...

So, I thought it might be fun to take a look at unique wedding invitations, as we begin today. I've had a lot of weddings in the past few months, so this must be the season. Now, some I found were a little more appropriate than others, so I'll be selective. But, here goes...

- We're Getting Hitched...
- 'STUFF' just got real...
- Booze, Food, and Bad Dance Moves...
- The Wanted Poster Invite...
- Two Racoons...
- And if you're from Wisconsin ... FREE BEER (oh, and a wedding)...
- Come for the LOVE, stay for the PARTY...
- THERE WILL BE NO TRADITIONS (*read this one!*)...
- WE'RE IN LOVE ... TAKE THE PLUNGE... And finally,
- You're NOT invited to our wedding (they eloped)!

Well, I hope you enjoyed these, but the point today is ... invitations are so important, aren't they? What would life be without invitations? The invites are important because they're always (or usually) connected to very important, life-altering occasions...

So, with that in mind, what's more important than inviting people to come and connect with the God of the universe? Especially if it has everything to do with their eternal well-being? A man by the name of Andrew certainly thought the invite was important—especially to connect with God, to come meet Jesus of Nazareth, the long-awaited Messiah. Shall we get right into the story? This is from the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Let me set it up for you...

John the Baptist was a great prophet and he had been telling everyone that the Messiah, the Son of God, the one God was going to use to save the world ... was going to come. And he did come. And when Jesus met John the Baptist (to get baptized, etc.), John already had a lot of followers. But John ended up telling his followers, 'Hey, stop following me! Don't follow me any longer! From now on, you need to be following Jesus' ... and this is where the story picks up. Listen (John 1:40-49, NLT)...

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. ⁴¹ Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ").

⁴² Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas" (which means "Peter").

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me." ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown.

⁴⁵ Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”
“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

What a fabulous story this is! And here’s what I want you to notice in this story: *Peter and Nathaniel’s lives are changed dramatically because they meet/encounter Jesus!* In fact, their lives are turned upside down for the good. But, and here it is (always a transition in the story when the word ‘but’ is used), Peter never would have encountered Jesus had his brother Andrew never loved him enough to invite him to come with him! And Nathaniel would never have received the eternal life Jesus offered had his friend, Philip, not cared enough about him to invite him to come and see Jesus! And that leads us to our IGNITE PRINCIPLE for the week, which is: **God wants me to invite my friends to come to church with me.** Because here’s the truth: There was no way Peter was going to hear about Jesus if Andrew had not told him. And there was not way Nathaniel would have known that anything good could come from Nazareth ... if Philip had not invited him to come along to see Jesus one day...

And I want you to listen to me for a moment. *There are people in your life that are never going to experience the life-changing, life-altering love of God that comes through Jesus Christ unless you invite them to come and see for yourself!* You can literally change someone’s life and their eternity, simply by inviting them to come and see what Jesus is all about! And I want us to spend the rest of our time together today looking at ... *how my/your invitation can change the world*, but 5 things must happen. *First...*

Believe that Jesus can change lives. Do you believe that? You must...

I believe the reason Andrew was so quick to bring his brother to see Jesus is because he knew this: When Peter met Jesus, his life would be changed forever! And the reason Philip was so excited about bringing his friend, Nathaniel, to meet Jesus, is that he knew that once he did, his life would never be the same...

As I picture Andrew in my mind, I can just hear Jesus saying to him ‘Come, follow me!’ He starts to follow Jesus and then he stops dead in his tracks. He let’s Jesus know, ‘Jesus, I want to follow you, but my brother Peter’s image just popped into my mind, and I have to go get my brother. My brother needs to meet you! I love him too much for him to miss out on this...’

You see, folks, it starts with us. *We really have to believe the power of Jesus can change lives!* And, we need to believe that Jesus is the only bridge to God (remember

that illustration from last week) ... and that our friends, our co-workers, and our family ... really need to have Jesus in their lives...

You see, the Bible tells us that when someone says 'yes' to Jesus, two things happen: 1) That person receives eternal life. When someone says 'yes' to Jesus, asks Jesus into their heart—to be Lord of their life, they turn their lives around and begin to follow Jesus. The Bible tells us when Jesus comes into our lives, he forgives every sin (what stands between us and God) and makes us righteous before God, so we can come into his presence ... for eternity. And look at what this verse says (2 Tim. 1:10), "And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News."

But Jesus didn't just promise eternal life. We need to understand this. He also promised, (2) when we give our lives to him, that he brings purpose, meaning, and fulfillment into our lives in the present. He promises all of us who may be carrying weight and burdens on our shoulders—whatever they are, that he will take that weight away from us, leaving us with a life purpose—a kingdom purpose. Look at Jesus' words from Matt. 11:28 with me: "Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens....'" Is there anyone here carrying a burden today? 'Anyone at all? If so, you'll want to listen carefully to the last part of V. 28: "...and I will give you rest."

Folks, Jesus never wasted his breath on anything. If he said it, he meant it. And Jesus' promises always come true—always. If you're carrying a heavy burden today, leave it at the foot of the cross. Let Jesus have it. And you will experience rest. And I know we all have friends or co-workers or family who need that kind of relief too. We've got to believe Jesus can change their lives, too! Then comes the second thing...

Recognize that Jesus wants to use you to do it. Recognize Jesus wants to use *me*...

Do you remember last week when we talked about God having you right where he wants you to be? This falls along those lines of truth. You see, God has you where you are for a reason. Whether it's in your job, your family, your having the friends you have, or living in the neighborhood you live in, it's all for a reason when you're a Christ-follower. God wants to use you to influence people in your life ... for Jesus. You see, Philip was in Nathaniel's life. And Andrew was Peter's brother for a reason. God wanted to use them

Now, here's the truth. When you go to work tomorrow, you may very well be the only follower of Jesus in your workplace. So, who else in your workplace is going to invite your co-workers to church? Or when you go to class tomorrow, you may very well be the only Christian in your class. If you don't invite people, who else is going to invite them to check out Jesus? You may be the only person in your friend's life who's a Christian; think about that. We have responsibilities, don't we? Eternal responsibilities. Now, allow me to let you in on a little secret...

Did you know that the #1 reason people come to church is because ... a friend invites them? If a friend cares enough to reach out, and to invite them to an event that's important to them, chances are pretty good they'll come to see what it's all about. And God wants to use YOU for that purpose. He wants us to invite our friends, our family,

and co-workers; because, if we don't, they may never receive that invitation ... to come and meet Jesus—a life changing introduction. In fact, Jesus last word to his disciples were these (Matt. 28:19-20): “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” So, #1, believe Jesus can change lives! #2, recognize Jesus wants to use you to accomplish that. And, #3...

Identify people in my sphere of influence to invite. We ended last week's message time by reading a scripture together, from Col. 4:5, which says, “Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity” ... and that's exactly what we're doing here.

Even if you're not taking notes today, I want to challenge you to look at the note sheet—under #III, where we're now prayerfully considering people in your life who God may want *you* to invite to church. And my desire would be for you to make this a matter of prayer. So, how do we 'make the most of every opportunity?'

In your notes there is a list: 4 different spheres of influence—4 different areas of life where we know people. We're going to talk about what the possibilities are, then to the right of that list, I want you to start writing down names—as God reveals them to you, in the right-hand column. Here's the spheres we need to consider:

- FAMILY – Andrew. This is what Andrew and Peter were—family. When Andrew'd met Jesus and decided to follow him, who's the first person that came to his mind? Family—his brother, Peter. And Peter then came to meet Jesus ... and the rest is history—like the Gospel of Mark (Peter's account)... It could be a spouse. It could be a parent. It could be a child, a cousin, an uncle or an aunt. God' knows. And if you'll pray about it, you'll know too ... who is ready for the invitation.
- FRIENDS – Philip and Nathaniel. This is the category they were in. Philip chose to follow Jesus. But then he couldn't get his friend, Nathaniel, off his mind. He told him he had to come and see Jesus for himself (even though he was from Nazareth). But Nathaniel accepted the invitation and his life was changed forever. How 'bout this sphere?
- CO-WORKERS/CLASSMATES – Whether you have a job or you're in school, you have people—for better or for worse—that you spend a good deal of your weekdays with. And you're saying, “I don't even like my co-workers!” Or you may be thinking, “I can't stand this class at school!” Here's a question for you: Does God love those at your workplace or in your class? Could it be that what's going on in your life *is not about you*? God has kingdom purposes that *you* are a part of... And finally,
- NEIGHBORS OR OTHERS – These are the people you may not spend but a few minutes a month with, but they count too ... don't they? Wouldn't God love your neighbors too—regardless? (We're all on the same rung, you know; we all need Jesus!) If you're doing yard work, taking your kids to a play group, etc., who are the people you run into there? Now, don't just jump down their throat and do

something that will ruin the chance they'd come to church—ever. Remember Paul's words from Col. 4:6: "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." Pray about it. You'll know what to do ... and what to say...

And that leads us to the final two items regarding 'invitation'...

Care enough to extend an invitation to church. Folks, if you really believe Jesus can change lives; if you really believe Jesus is the way to eternal life AND real life, here and now; and if you identify people in your life who need him ... and you care about these people in your life, the very least you can do for them is to invite them to come to church so they can learn more about Jesus. That's what Philip did for Nathaniel; come and see for yourself... And finally,

Experience God's blessing in my own life. Now, why does God make such a big deal about us sharing our faith, about helping others to connect with him? Why?

If you think about it, after we die—as believers, we're in heaven, right? And there's really only two things we can't do in heaven. Heaven's a beautiful place, to the best of my knowledge. We'll be able to dance and sing and work and play—everything that brings us JOY in heaven. And we can do cartwheels. I used to tell everyone I could after my mom's death ... "She's in heaven doing cartwheels!" Why? Did she like to do cartwheels? No. I'd never known my mom to do one cartwheel. But in heaven, *she could*... That was the point...

But, in heaven—even though it's a beautiful place, there're two things we won't be able to do. Did you know that? 1) We cannot sin. The Bible says there'll be no sin in heaven. It's a perfect place. There won't be pain. There won't be hurt. There won't be fear. There won't be anger. There won't be regret. There won't be shame. A perfect place... So, what's the other thing, besides sin, we won't be able to do in heaven?

The second thing is 2) we won't be able to tell our friends and the people we care most about ... about Jesus. It'll be too late then to invite them to 'come and see for themselves' what a difference Jesus can make in their life...

That's why it's such a big deal to help others get connected to God—to invite them to church to meet Jesus...

And here's the other thing: *God will bless those who do invite*. Let's close with this scripture. Please read it with me (Matt. 25:23): "**The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'**" This is what Jesus said and this is a blessing we will receive when we step out of our comfort zone, begin to live out our faith, and invite others to come to know Jesus, too...